

# Cross Roads Institute

## STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN RICK BOUCHER

### Grand Opening of the Crossroads Institute

Galax, Virginia

June 27, 2005

I am pleased to return to Galax this morning to take part in celebrating the grand opening of the Crossroads Institute, a large and comprehensive facility which will serve the needs of residents in Carroll and Grayson Counties, the City of Galax, Wythe, Smyth and Bland Counties in many capacities. Beginning today this facility will provide an environment to promote the growth and launch of locally owned business and a wide range of educational and entrepreneurial training, counseling and assistance to residents from every walk of life.

The project which led to the Crossroads Institute began in the late 1990's when I formed a regional task force to study and formulate a plan for the establishment of small business incubators across our region as a means to encourage the development of locally owned small businesses. Based on the groundwork laid by that task force, and a feasibility study conducted by Virginia Tech, plans were developed for a small business incubator to serve Carroll and Grayson Counties, the City of Galax, Wythe, Smyth and Bland Counties. As the project took shape, an innovative concept that combined the plans for a regional small business incubator with the idea for a facility to encourage continued education and workplace training was also formulated by the education authorities of the counties in the region and the City of Galax in partnership with Wytheville Community College. The merger of these concepts resulted in what surrounds us today, the Crossroads Institute.

The federal government has contributed substantially to the project. In September of 2002, three provisions of federal funding totaling \$4.9 million were provided.

At my request, the U.S. Department of Commerce, through its Economic Development Administration, provided a federal grant in the amount of \$2 million. In addition, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, through its Rural Development Agency, awarded a \$2.2 million low-interest federal loan, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development agreed to provide a federal Community Development Block Grant for the project in the amount of \$700,000.

Beyond the federal funding, the Virginia Tobacco Commission awarded a grant in the amount of \$800,000, completing the funding package necessary for the \$5.7 million project.

Utilizing these funds, the former Lowes building, in which we stand today has been completely renovated and expanded to house the Crossroads Institute. Prior to expansion, the building occupied 60,000 square feet. Now, with the addition of a second floor, the facility occupies nearly 80,000 square feet. 17,000 square feet of that space is dedicated to the Southwest Regional Enterprise Center which houses the small business incubator. 41,000 square feet is space allocated for use by the region's public schools and Wytheville Community College, and 10,000 square feet is multi-purpose space which includes a large computer laboratory, kitchen, exhibit hall and conference rooms. An additional 10,000 square feet of space has been left unfinished so as to best accommodate future growth at the Institute.

The Crossroads Institute is now divided into three separate centers which are all housed here. The first center is the Southwest Regional Enterprise Center which is the regional small business incubator. The incubator here at the Crossroads Institute now has leasable space available for up to 15 businesses for either office or light manufacturing operations. To date, local entrepreneurs have been highly interested in locating their businesses at the Crossroads Institute, and approximately 50 inquiries have already been made by potential local business start-ups. Following the hiring of an Executive Director to manage and oversee the Southwest Regional Enterprise Center, businesses will begin to occupy the incubator later this fall. I am confident that the Institute will enjoy the same notable success in launching small businesses which has characterized the work of other incubators in our region, with consequent benefits for the region's economy.

Tenant businesses of the incubator will have access to a wide range of benefits and services offered at the Crossroads Institute. All utilities will be provided to tenant businesses who locate their operations within the incubator, including electricity, gas, water, sewer and garbage removal services. In addition, local telephone service will be provided. All tenants of the incubator will also have access to high-speed Internet services which will be provided through a DS3 data line.

Tenant businesses will have special unfettered access to the educational and business assistance offerings which will be provided at the Institute, including special access to the course instructors. As a final component of the amenities which will be offered here, a \$14,000 federal grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission is being used to compile the Southwest Virginia Online Business Directory. Once established, this Directory of existing businesses will be an outstanding resources for businesses located at the incubator.

The second center which now inhabits the Crossroads Institute is the Center for Technical and Entrepreneurial Studies which will provide workforce training to the region's residents and additional learning opportunities in technical and occupational program areas to high school and college students. Classes have already begun here at the Institute, and the course offerings will be expanded as time goes on.

The Center is now furnished with state-of-the-art classroom furniture and lab equipment which has been purchased using a \$150,000 federal grant. Five traditional classrooms, two electronic classrooms and two mobile electronic classrooms which are fully equipped to enable distance learning opportunities are now available for use at the Institute. In addition, a construction technologies lab has been built to support courses in the electrical and plumbing trades, and an allied health lab for students seeking certification as a Licensed Practical Nurse or Medical Assistant will be in operation.

Additional course offerings which are being planned for the Center for Technical and Entrepreneurial Studies include: Construction Management, Heavy Equipment Operations, Heavy Equipment Repair, Precision Machining, High Voltage Line Technician, Internet Webmaster Certification, E-commerce and the Culinary Arts. Space for a teaching and demonstration kitchen for the Culinary Arts program and workshops for several of the other technical and trade courses are currently being completed.

The third center which will be housed here at the Crossroads Institute is the Center for Lifelong Learning which will offer programs that will enable residents to earn their GED or take English as a Second Language classes. It will provide continuing education classes and corporate training as well as pre-employment training and job skills analysis. The Center for Lifelong Learning is expected to be open this fall.

Housed in the common areas of the Crossroads Institute which will be available to all users of the facility are the computer laboratory and public Internet access site. Located on the ground floor, the computer lab is equipped with 60 computer workstations which have access to the Internet through a high-speed DS3 data line. A second computer lab housing 40 computer workstations is located on the second floor. This lab will be used primarily for instructional purposes associated with the Center for Technical and Entrepreneurial Studies, but the lab will also serve as a public computer access site. Final work is also being completed at the Crossroads Institute to enable wireless Internet access throughout the building so that anyone making use of the Institute's facilities will have the capability to surf the Internet wirelessly using a laptop computer.

This collaborative, well-conceptualized, innovative educational and economic development partnership, all housed in the Crossroads Institute, is now poised to become an asset to both the economic and educational development of our region that is unparalleled. The Crossroads Institute promises to stimulate the creation of new jobs and to ensure that all of our region's residents, both young and old, are better prepared for their chosen career through the establishment of a firmer educational foundation.

The Crossroads Institute is an excellent example of the cooperative efforts of Carroll, Grayson, Wythe, Smyth and Bland County officials and the City of Galax, area public schools, Wytheville Community College and the many others who partnered in a project which holds great promise for economic growth and job creation for our region.

Dr. Oliver McBride, Superintendent of Schools for Carroll County and Chairman of the Crossroads Institute Board, other members of Crossroads Institute Board and Dr. Ann Alexander, President of Wytheville Community College, have led the development of the educational component of the Crossroads project, and I commend them for their foresight and active work.

Linda DiYorio, my former district director lead the formation and work of the regional task force that created the plan for the small business incubator component of the project. She did great work during her decade in my office, and no project better symbolizes that effort. I thank Linda for her tremendous contribution to the Crossroads Institute.

Dr. David Johnson, Director of Continuing Education for Wytheville Community College; Bill Smith, Chairman of the Southwest Regional Enterprise Center and its Board; Members of the Advisory Committee for the Center for Lifelong Learning and the Advisory Committee for the Center for Technical and Entrepreneurial Studies; have also made outstanding contributions of leadership and ideas, and I thank them.

The Galax City Council, the Boards of Supervisors of the Counties of Carroll, Grayson, Wythe, Smyth and Bland and the counties' school systems have strongly supported the project and receive our thanks and congratulations on this success.

Sally Hamer and Travis Jackson, Regional Directors of the Rural Development Agency, provided able assistance in processing the application for Department of Agriculture monies. I thank them for their continued efforts on behalf of the many communities of the Ninth District.

I also want to recognize Virginia Secretary of Commerce and Trade Mike Schewel and Bill Shelton, Director of the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, for their work in administering the federal CDBG and ARC funds for this project.

The Virginia legislators representing this region have also contributed a tremendous amount of support to this project. I thank them for being here, and I would like to recognize each of them: State Senator Roscoe Reynolds, State Senator William Wampler, Delegate Ward Armstrong and Delegate Bill Carrico.

The Crossroads Institute is an excellent investment in the economy of Southwest Virginia. The small business incubator and the educational training which will be provided by the Institute will greatly enhance economic opportunities. Today is truly a red letter day in the Twin County and Mt. Rogers regions.